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Make a Difference Day

"What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?" asked author George Eliot. Or how about Hubert H. Humphrey's comment that "the impersonal hand of government can never replace the helping hand of a neighbor."

I use both of these citations to illustrate what Make a Difference Day is all about. This national day of helping others is sponsored annually by the Points of Light Foundation and *USA Weekend Magazine*, and this year will be celebrated on Saturday, October 25th.

Make a Difference Day encourages all of us to serve our communities in the American tradition of neighbors helping neighbors. Last year over 3 million Americans were inspired to make a difference in their communities on that day, including thousands in Michigan. Projects ranged from raking leaves and collecting canned goods to renovating a community shelter and landscaping a county park.

Kids from Alexander Elementary School in Adrian heaped together enough toilet paper, paper towels, tissues, napkins and plates to stuff a minivan and delivered the goods to a domestic violence shelter. Members of Boy Scout Troop 190 – a "Helping Hands" troop of young men with disabilities – and Cub Scout Pack 240 teamed up to rake and clean up the yards of elderly residents. The boys met their match at one woman's house where they worked for six hours to remove trash, chemicals, newspapers (some dating to 1958) and other hazardous items. And 90 enthusiastic Hope College students dispersed to six retirement homes to bring a day of fun and festivities to the residents, making crafts, giving manicures, singing, cooking and playing games with the senior citizens. Many formed friendships with the seniors and continue to visit monthly.

It doesn't matter if your project is large or small, or if it is one tackled only by you or in conjunction with your family, co-workers or other organizations. What is important is grasping the opportunity to help others. This spirit of caring brings people together and strengthens the very neighborhoods and communities in which we live. And what a wonderful way to teach children the importance of helping others. Too often today, we go about our daily business not even paying attention to those around us because of our busy lives.

Make a Difference Day provides a day to pause and concentrate on others. It is a day to celebrate neighbors helping neighbors. It is a day to spread some cheer, for many or even for just one person.

If you would like to make a difference but don't know where to start, I suggest you contact your church or synagogue or a local association in your community to see if they are sponsoring a specific project that day. Or you can visit www.makeadifferenceday.com to access project ideas and a directory of local projects. If you cannot participate on Saturday for religious reasons, you can do your project on Sunday.

Each year in April, hundreds of good deeds done on Make a Difference Day are selected for honors, headlines and charitable donations. Information in regard to submitting your project is also available at the above-mentioned website.

The strength of our nation lies in the willingness of each of us to help one another. The spirit of volunteerism and giving is unique to Americans who are the most giving people in the world. Won't you join with me and consider giving of yourself this year on Make a Difference Day? As that great tennis player Arthur Ashe so aptly stated in Days of Grace: From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life.